

# Committee on Resources

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## Witness Testimony

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Testimony on the Effects of International Forestry Agreements  
on Forest Service Decision Making

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Before the

House of Representatives

Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health

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Thank you Madam Chairman for the invitation to testify before this hearing. My name is Marvin Brown. I am Administrator of the Division of Forestry for the Missouri Department of Conservation. I am also Vice President of the National Association of State Foresters (NASF), and for the past several years have represented NASF as a technical advisor to the U.S. State Department on a number of international delegations where the principal topic of discussion has been intergovernmental cooperation in matters related to forest management.

NASF's involvement has included forest related meetings of the United Nations Council on Sustainable Development (UNCSD), the Inter-governmental Panel on Forests chartered by the UNCSD, the Montreal Process for the Development of Criteria and Indicators for the Conservation and Sustainable Management of Temperate and Boreal Forests, and the Committee of Forestry under the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN. Next month I will also participate on the U.S. Delegation to the Eleventh World Forestry Congress in Antalya, Turkey.

As some brief, additional background I would add that the National Association of State Foresters is an organization comprised of the State forestry agencies for all fifty States in the U.S., as well as the U.S. territories and the District of Columbia. Collectively, we are involved in the protection and management of forest lands in the U.S. which are owned by private individuals, or by our own state governments, as well as frequent involvement in lands owned by local government or even forest industry. At the National level, we support forestry programs for private lands which are voluntary, non-regulatory, and incentive-based.

In total, our members are a regular governmental contact to over 80% of this Nation's forests, which are producing over 85% percent of the Nation's wood products. In addition, our personnel and fire-fighting resources are regularly deployed in the protection of lands owned by the U.S. government; up to a level that may approach 35% of all resources applied to wildland fires on Federal lands during the most severe fire situations.

THE LONG AND SHORT OF MY TESTIMONY IS THIS: The National Association of State Foresters is a major stakeholder in U.S. forestry. We have sought to become actively involved in international forest policy dialogues, such as those just mentioned. Strong U.S. leadership in these dialogues is clearly in this country's best interest. The U.S. Forest Service role in providing this leadership should not just be maintained, but enhanced. Fulfilling that leadership role in no way threatens the autonomy of U.S. forest

management decisions. In fact, the more involved we become, the more benefit we stand to gain and the more our interests are represented.

TO ELABORATE: The United States is the largest importer, and second largest exporter, of wood products in the world. The forested lands which NASF members work with are a part of this global activity and, therefore, we feel we have an active stake in international forest policy discussions. Both global markets and domestic consumption influence the value of standing timber in the U.S. and these market values determine how forest landowners manage their holdings.

When markets are good and timber values are high, landowners are more likely to invest in forest management opportunities. Forests, and their multiple benefits to society are maintained because of these economic incentives. Thus healthy markets, both globally and domestically, can promote healthy forests. The influence here is two-sided, in that U.S. consumption of imported wood products gives value to forestland in other countries, and thus provides one more reason for those nations to protect their forests rather than allowing them to be converted to other uses. International forest policy can affect those markets and U.S. involvement in all phases of those policy discussions is critical.

Not only does our country have a dominant influence on today's world-wide forestbased economy, but this stature gives us a responsibility for ensuring that the Earth's forest resources are sustained for future generations. If we are to sustain forests for the generations which will follow us, the very first thing we have to understand is the condition of forests at the present time. That is why we have actively supported and participated in the Montreal Process to develop Criteria and Indicators for the Conservation and Sustainable Management of Temperate and Boreal Forests.

The result of this cooperative international effort has been the development of a measurement tool which a country can use to study the sustainability of their forest management. The tool does not judge a country's sustainability. It does not dictate, nor even suggest, how, or to what extent, sustainability should be achieved. It simply provides a list of things to measure, and in so doing a Country can make its own determination of whether they would prefer those measurements to change in the future.

The Montreal Process provides a list of seven criteria and 67 national level indicators. The U.S. Forest Service led an initial attempt to conduct a criteria and indicators assessment for the U.S., known as a First Approximation Report. This assessment revealed that many of these 67 items are readily measurable, some could be measured with additional effort, and some may not be feasible to measure at all. Still, the National Association of State Foresters has gone on record encouraging the Forest Service to aggressively develop further assessments utilizing criteria and indicators and to use those assessments to guide debate in the development of this Nation's forest policy.

If the United States had not been involved in the Montreal Process from beginning to end it is doubtful that the Criteria and Indicators measurement tool would have been sufficiently relevant to U.S. conditions. As it happened, we were able to bring to the international discussion a number of elements which we feel are highly pertinent to sustainability. These include such things as clear laws related to land ownership and tenure rights, levels of investment in forest health and productivity, and others. Since private forest landowners are the State Foresters' most important constituents, we feel that protection and enhancement of a landowner's ability to conduct management is crucial to sustainability. You will find this concern evident among a number of the indicators.

You should also note that the Criteria and Indicators are typical, in many ways, of the international

agreements that have dealt with forestry. From the UNCED Conference in 1992 where the Bush Administration committed the U.S. to sustainable forestry, to the Santiago Declaration endorsing the Criteria and Indicators in 1995, the agreements reached on forestry have been non-legally binding. In fact, there is fairly strong consensus in the forestry community, ranging from industrial to environmental interests, that a legally-binding convention is not needed nor would it be helpful in achieving sustainable forestry. The State Department and the Forest Service have worked to ensure that this is a consistent message of U.S. delegations to international meetings.

It is also important to remember that in implementing the Criteria and Indicators here at home, the Forest Service has an opportunity to use the C&I to do many things it is already legally mandated to do, only to do them in a more organized and efficient manner. The Forest Service already has a mandate to inventory all forest lands, as well as to monitor the health of all forests and develop strategic plans to guide forest policy. The data gathered through the Forest Inventory and Analysis program is critical to economic decisions made by the forest products industry and land management decisions made by forest landowners and managers. The Criteria and Indicators can bring coherence to our national efforts to understand the state and trends of our forested estate.

Concerning the Forest Service's involvement in these arenas, we feel strongly that increasing this activity will do more than just further our interests and provide us with more useful tools. The delegations I have been personally involved with stand out as excellent examples to other nations. Participants from the State Department, the Forest Service, the State Foresters, forest industry and, at times, the conservation community have demonstrated to others that local autonomy, landowner rights, free enterprise, and conservation concerns can be molded into a sound and successful approach to sustainable forestry.

That is a message and model we need to take to the international community much, much more.... not less. For example, my participation has given me the opportunity to explain to others that with nearly 10 million individual private forest landowners, each with the right to exercise their own unique vision of forest management on their lands, we have the most participative forest management decision environment in the world. These 10 million landowners provide over 60% of our wood fiber supply, while still providing for multiple values like clean air, water, and abundant wildlife. I feel that we bring a positive influence to other nations and in the process end up protecting and promoting our own interests even more.

IN SUMMARY I WOULD JUST SAY AGAIN: The U.S. is a dominant interest in world forestry, but at the same time, what happens in global markets affects the decisions of our forest landowners. The National Association of State Foresters feels global forest issues are important enough that we want to stay highly involved. We would like the Forest Service to not only stay involved, but be encouraged to exercise even more leadership in the future. The efforts to date, such as Criteria and Indicators do not threaten the autonomy of U.S. decision-making, either on the Federal lands or by our private landowners. In fact, they have given us some useful tools and the chance to showcase the effectiveness of our own democratic, landownership-based methods of decision-making.

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